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ABSTRACT

This document contains an introduction to a group of papers in which the authors/professors who have designed and taught graduate or undergraduate courses in educational technology engage readers in the ideas of narrative as a part of teaching. The instructors also encourage readers to consider alternate approaches to teaching and learning that accompany the course content, background, and methods presented. The author describes her development from technology-illiterate middle school English teacher to a scholar of educational communications. Discussion includes her education and qualitative research conducted during her study of research methods and statistics with an educational anthropologist and sociologists. The author then describes one of her courses at Northern Illinois University, a doctoral seminar that focuses on research problems in the field of educational communications technology. It allows students to develop a literature review and a preliminary proposal on their chosen topic. By the end of the class, students begin to understand the field's more critical questions regarding ethical effects, and the qualitative questions of how technology works in the world of education. (AEF)

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Stories of our Teaching: Educational Technology in Context

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Introduction to the Panel

Teaching is more than the sum of its parts. Teaching in any field, at any level, involves many human aspects of communication, thought, and caring. And teaching at the university level, in educational technology, has been too little discussed and investigated. The aspects of caring, of communication, and of dialogue that are embedded in our teaching have for the most part been ignored in our reports of program practices and curricular innovations. We somehow find it more important to discuss our learning theories, our authentic tasks and apprenticeships, or our assessment procedures.

But many of us find that the stories of our teaching are becoming insistent; they want to be told, retold, shared, and discussed. The dialogue that we should be having involves not just our theories or our research, but our methods of teaching. This panel presentation and series of papers begins to look at an emerging area of educational technology teaching, from a narrative perspective.

The idea of narrative in education is growing more popular and vital. Witherell and Noddings (1991) have presented a collection of essays which explore this narrative from a variety of content perspectives. We plan to follow their example to provide narrative explorations of our teaching. "The use of narrative and dialogue can serve as a model for teaching and learning across the boundaries of disciplines, professions, and cultures" (p.2). Acceptance of narrative and story has grown to include many other disciplines. For example, the NCTE 1996 annual conference theme was "Honoring All Our Stories". The program guide introduced the theme by saying "listening to one anothers' stories is a way to honor our differences and discover our commonalties. Through such sharing we can consider how our individual stories weave with those different from our own to form the fabric of our community." (Avery, p. 3). Many of the presentations at that conference focused on using narrative to help students learn; one such panel was entitled, "Telling our Stories Out of School"; another was "'How Stories Define Us".

The teller or writer of a story adds meaning to that story, "meaning embedded in his or her culture, language, gender, beliefs, and life history. This embeddedness lies at the core of the teaching-learning experience... " (p. 3). Bruner (1985, cited in Witherell and Noddings, 1991, p. 3) called stories a part of the way we understand human experience, as important as the paradigmatic or logico-scientific mode of knowing. Teaching involves both ways of knowing; "it calls on both narrative and analytic ways of knowing...it asks us to address the moral and aesthetic as well as the practical aspects of everyday experience" (p.9). It is these practical aspects and everyday experiences which we feel need to be shared and discussed.

Teaching is more than pedagogy; it is personal and individual, and helps the teacher as well as the student, since "...stories help us find our place in the world; caring, respectful dialogue among all those engaged in educational settings..." helps us come "to understand ourselves, others, and the possibilities life holds for us" (Witherell and Noddings, 1991, p. 10).

> Teaching is, among other things, a discursive and interpretive practice, just as the writing of autobiography is. Teaching is textual. When we teach, we tell stories about the world. Some stories are scientific, some historical, some philosophical, some literary and so on. Educational theories are stories about how teaching and learning work, about who does what to whom and for what purposes; and, most particularly, educational theories are stories about the kind of world we want to live in and about what we should do to make that world. Stories...help us to find our place in the world (Pagano, p. 197).

Each paper in this group introduces the author/professor who has designed and taught a course in educational technology from a socio-cultural or alternative perspective. Our courses are for undergraduates and graduate students, on technology, design, and research topics. Each presenter has developed their own theoretical stance, has shared their thoughts and feelings as well as content and structure throughout a class, and has had the course evaluated and revised through student input over the semesters. The courses include a doctoral seminar in research topics, an

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undergraduate media and technology in teaching course, an alternative instructional design and development class, and the issue of Conceptual Analysis developed within two different educational technology courses.

This symposium shares the stories of these courses with participants, asking them to help develop the texts, be involved in the stories, and share the dialogue with the panel. These papers engage their readers in the ideas of narrative as a part of teaching, and encourage them to consider alternate approaches to teaching and learning that accompany the course content, background and methods presented.

You Have a T-Rex Here?

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Introduction

In completing a class last semester, students were doing presentations as part of their assignment. Two students were giving a train-the trainer session on the Internet, and as part of their presentation they had furnished little toys and give-aways for the participants. They had selected one especially for me, and gave it to me with smiles or smirks on their faces. It was this dinosaur...a symbol I took seriously to represent something about myself. I then told the class the story about a colleague's saying to me that he and I were like dinosaurs, who were going to die in the mud, if we didn't become more avid technology users.

In that same class, one night I was planning to show a movie entitled *Animation Pie*, which shows a late 1970's film production in the schools project and features several animated films and their young filmmakers working. One of the class members turned and saw that I was using a 16mm film projector, and exclaimed quite loudly, "Oh my word, how do you even know how to work one of those? I've never even seen one before!" After we all had a good laugh, I realized that the gulf between myself and my students was ever widening; but I planned to stand my ground. How did I learn to work one of those, indeed...that's what got me into our field in the first place.

Personal Background

I started out as a English major, like Randy Nichols (see related paper), and also learned to explicate text as a part of my academic preparation. After I student-taught at the middle school level, all administrators who interviewed me thought I'd be "perfect for their junior high," even though I had a master's degree in American literature and wanted to teach Twain. So I ended up teaching 7th and 8th grade language arts to kids who didn't care about Twain or Hawthorn or poetry or even sentence structure...but they did like media. Our language arts team then created a film club, produced the school newspaper, and taught open reel video production in our classes, including a long unit on television and news, advertising, and American humor as revealed by television.

After five years of that, I decided for personal reasons to go back to school, and investigated the Communication Arts program at Wisconsin, my alma mater, to see if I could earn a second master's degree in media. After I was admitted there, I was blessed by an incredible piece of luck—I took the time to try to meet Ann DeVaney and interview with her regarding the Educational. Communications program...and knew I'd found my home. I spent four years with her and was tremendously gifted to work with her as a TA, teaching classes in the program. Two of many defining events were my taking a film analysis class and then minoring in film study , something that had little precedent in education (for someone to have a doctoral minor in Communications / Liberal Arts and a major in Education). The second event was being encouraged by Ann to study research methods and statistics with an educational anthropologist and sociologists rather than with the Educational Psychology statistics faculty. I conducted what I back then timidly called descriptive research, but I actually did one of the first qualitative studies in our program. Impacting all of these and other experiences was the influence of working with Ann, whose interest in critical theory, and textual analysis pervaded all our work. Her openness to alternate viewpoints and her encouragement regarding qualitative research was the pivotal influence in my development. She should be credited with having that impact on everyone in the field, not just her own program, as she published and spoke about these issues very early on. She also graduated a group of us, Streibel, McIsaac, Considine, Chute, Muffaletto, Koetting, Knupfer,, who went on to continue growing and spreading the critical viewpoints in which we were fostered at UW.

Teaching Perspectives

As I've developed as a professor at NIU, I have continued to bring the textual analysis and media emphasis of my background to the classes I design and teach. I have added critical theory readings to our doctoral seminars, I developed a course in visual literacy, and I encourage qualitative research for our students, teaching a course in naturalistic inquiry and infusing those ideas into all our seminar classes. The class I want to explain in this presentation is a doctoral seminar, required of all students, that focuses on the research problems in our field, and allows students to develop a literature review and a preliminary proposal on their chosen topic.

The class also includes reading about the "big" issues and problems in our field, and includes an assignment for them to read and present to class the work of some of the more critical thinkers in the field. (At an earlier 1995 presentation at this conference, I presented on this class and shared the Appended reading list). The responsibility I have taken on is to move students through several stages, from disinterest, to discomfort, to grudging admiration, to acceptance of alternate or critical viewpoints. It is a sometimes painful process of having students rebel, complain, and dodge ideas, and I am able to report only partial success with my model However, I can share some stories from last semester.

Early in the class, people were reluctant to read from the assigned list. They wanted to chose Gates or an advanced design model text, not *Paradigms Regained*. The students start the class as what I consider typical educational technology students—they are technology directors, learning resource deans, administrators of distance education systems, help desk managers, and so on. The ideas inherent in the readings I assign are often very new to them. They are comfortable reading Bill Gates, but not Chet Bowers. They love sharing the ideas from Jonessen, but not from Muffaletto. But those that stuck with the suggested readings persevered, and presented these new ideas to the class.

The assignment to give a presentation to the class took several forms. For instance, to summarize his presentation, one person presented a series of film clips which portrayed, from older science fiction films, the views our culture has produced which show the "dark side" of technology. As we watched Michael Rennie as an alien or Peter Sellers as Dr. Strangelove, we contemplated the truths hidden in that popular science fiction.

Another student took us through a presentation obstensively about Bill Gates' ideas, but used several different instructional strategies which turned out to be those following Gardener's Multiple Intelligences. So while he shared more conventional ideas, he used the medium to be the message, and helped us feel our multiple ways of learning, the real point of the presentation.

A third student who spends his days crunching data for the social science research center presented on qualitative data analysis, and helped us understand the difference between the methods of conducting research using his own examples.

A fourth class member used Saul Alinsky's early work to help us see the issues of social action, considering it a type of diffusion of innovation from a new perspective. He encouraged the class to consider innovation as an answer to the question, "What can I do to make a difference?" He addressed the training needs of this changing society, and considered the problems of today's constant need to learn. He also looked at case studies as a way to frame research problems. "I still feel that humans are story tellers (narrative), and this is how we convey and store information, and make meaning of our lives. Narratives also shape our relative environments, and give clear understanding from a realistic standpoint without the manipulation of numbers (considering you can work numbers any way that you want)" he told us at the end of the class.

And finally, one international student (and these presentations were sequential, building to this one) very cleanly and succinctly summarized post-modernism and critical theory, and summarized for us the ideas towards which we had basically been evolving, putting the process into new perspective by presenting for us how we'd progressed throughout the semester to new understandings of these perspectives.

About halfway though the semester, one student came in fairly angry about some of the e-mail discussion that had taken place during the week, and said to us, "But don't you think it's very interesting, I mean just *so interesting*, that we, instructional technologists who promote technology all day, are being asked to criticize technology and find its negative capabilities? I mean, isn't that *interesting*?" After he finished, I allowed a long pause and then asked, "Just what do you mean by interesting?" And from there, the discussion proceeded about discomfort and anger and facing new ideas.

But by the end of the semester, my point of view and my purpose had been more than adequately addressed. Students really did understand that they may now ask more interesting, more critical questions than those they originally considered for their research. They moved off the "test" questions, the "how does it work" questions, the

comparative questions, and began to understand the field's need for the more critical questions regarding ethical effects, and the qualitative questions of how does this really work in the world of education? I felt successful in helping them grow to regard our field in a larger sense, in its impact on education and the world at large As I continue to work with these student this semester, I look forward to their research proposals and research questions. I hope that the reading we discussed last semester has allowed them to re-examine their topics and look for the more meaningful questions.

I often still feel like that dinosaur I showed you earlier, though I think I am making progress towards new learning in our technical field. In doing this paper, I worked on a laptop computer, riding in a car, using a cellular phone...but I still had trouble seeing the cursor and using the stupid touch pad instead of a mouse. And I still don't know how to create a great file management system so I don't lose important documents. However, more importantly, the ideas that our presentations and papers represent are not dying in the mud; they are in fact growing and becoming more readily a part of the language of this field. The personal tone of these presentations may encourage us all to continue the dialogue and take our academic discourse to new levels of narrative truth.

After all, as Crichton and Spielberg have shown us, dinosaurs may actually live again.

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